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Meeting Notes

Attendees: See Attached List Date/Time: 11/28/01 5:00 to 7:00PM open house & 7:00PM Presentation

Project No.: 50885

Place: McLaughlin Middle School, Manchester NH Re: Manchester Public Informational Meeting

Notes taken by: Bruce A. Tasker

Prior to the formal presentation, plans were set up in an "open house" setting to address issues, comments, and questions in an informal matter with the public on an individual basis.

For the formal meeting, Jeff Brillhart opened the meeting and made introductions. He explained that this meeting is one of five Public Informational meetings being held by the Department in each of the communities along the study section of I-93 from Salem to Manchester. This meeting focuses what the Department has been doing for the last several months for the 18-mile study section of I-93 and more specifically the section of I-93 in Manchester beginning at the Londonderry/Manchester town line and running northerly to the I-93/I-293 split.

Jeff noted explained the Department is charged with improving the capacity and safety this 18-mile section. He explained that in the Salem and Manchester areas, the highway currently carries over 110,000 vpd (vehicles per day) and 70,000 vpd, respectively. I-93 has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000vpd to 70,000 vpd. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd in Salem and 85,000 vpd in Manchester. The highway is over capacity today. Given the volume of vehicles on the highway, and the narrow width of the highway, I-93 is less forgiving than it otherwise might be, and consequently less safe.

The Department is conducting the design and evaluation process using the format of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS follows five phases. The first phase or Scoping phase was completed in May 2000 with the publication of the Scoping Report. The second phase was completed in February of 2001 with the publication of the Rationale Report. The Rationale Report documents the evaluation and screening of various alternatives. The recommendations in the Rationale Report include the following:

- Consider widening I-93 to be three lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes south of Exit 3 and three lanes north of Exit 3 in both directions.

- Construct park and ride lots at Exits 2, 3, and 5, and enhance the Exit 4 Park and ride lot as appropriate.
- Expand existing bus service to Boston with stops at Exits 2, 3, and 5 as well as Exit 4.
- Enhance bus service by providing service between the NH park and ride lots and the industrial areas along I-93 in northern Massachusetts.
- Utilize Intelligent Transportation System Technology (ITS) and improve upon the Department's incident management capabilities.
- Incorporate TDM and TSM measures as practicable. The TSM would include short-term, localized improvements to address immediate safety concerns and capacity improvements where possible. TDM measures include initiatives to encourage motorists to carpool, use bus service, telecommute, and otherwise make fewer trips, and thus reduce demand on the highway.

The Rationale Report also suggested that the Department not pursue the following:

- Instituting rail service as part of this project at this point in time. Ridership for any rail service would not eliminate the need to widen the highway. However, the Report notes that rail service will in all likelihood be required in the future if NH is to maintain the level of mobility that is expected today. It is proposed that any widening of I-93 be done in such a manner as to retain the room for the possibility of a rail line in the highway corridor sometime in the future.
- Constructing high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, as the ridership will not meet the threshold necessary to justify the lanes.

Currently the Department is in Phase III of the EIS development process. The DEIS document is scheduled to be available in March of 2002.

Other activities the Department is addressing include:

- A bike route or trail is being evaluated along I-93 corridor.
- Potential secondary impacts are being evaluated, which are different than direct impacts. Direct impacts are impacts to resources (i.e. wetlands, etc.) and properties, which are immediately related to the highway-widening footprint. Secondary impacts (which may happen as a result of making NH more accessible by widening the highway) occur when additional homes and businesses are developed creating its own environmental impacts. To study these secondary impacts, the Department is utilizing an Expert Panel. The panel of experts in the fields of land use, development and economic issues are being asked to answer questions relative to what the growth in NH might be if I-93 is widened or not widened.
- Over the past year, the Department has been working with local safety (police and fire) agencies, State Police, and the FHWA to consider what steps might be taken to improve incident management capabilities; that is, addressing accidents along I-93 in a more timely manner to minimize delays and congestion. Some measures have been implemented and other will be added over the next year to improve the incident management capabilities before construction, during construction, and after construction is completed along the corridor.

- The Department is also pursuing mitigation sites along the corridor. One site in Salem is under construction and nearing completion; a second site in Londonderry is under design and will be constructed next year. The Department is working with each of the communities along the corridor to identify additional sites that will be necessary to offset the highway widening impacts to the environmental resources.

Jeff provided an overview of public feedback heard from the various local meetings. That feedback focused on the need to:

- Begin widening construction as soon as possible.
- Minimize impacts to private properties.
- Construct sound barriers to screen and shield neighborhoods.

Jeff also noted that the public, in a broad sense, feels that a 4-lane widening should be done vs. the 3-lane widening, with the idea that a 3-lane widening would require additional widening soon after the 3-lane widening is complete.

The individual towns have also expressed their particular concerns relative to how the project affects their communities.

For Salem a primary issue has been that the project not exacerbate the flooding that occurs in the Town and within the Spickett River watershed today.

For Windham and Salem, a predominant issue has been the need to address water quality and highway runoff, especially with Canobie Lake and Cobbett's Pond located adjacent to the corridor.

Windham is also very much interested in ways to reduce the overall footprint of the highway and the Exit 3 interchange.

In Londonderry and Salem, the neighborhoods have expressed concern about the proposed park and ride lots and the impacts on their quality of life. Various alternatives or means of minimizing impacts are being considered.

Plan Presentation:

Tony Grande presented the concept plans, including a regional perspective overview plan and a typical roadway cross-section plan for the 4-lane option which includes four 12' travel lanes and 12' wide shoulders on the inside and outside of each barrel. Tony noted that space (ranging from 60' to 90') for a potential future rail line is also being reserved within the median. The bike trail is conceptually depicted at the toe of slope or top of bank along the outside of the corridor from Exit 2 to Exit 5.

Tony also described a 400-scale plan showing the entire project limits beginning at the MA/NH state line and proceeding north to the I-93/I-293 split in Manchester. The 400-scale plan depicts a 4-lane option, but a 3-lane option is also available. Tony briefly presented the various interchange and mainline options for the entire project:

- Exit 1, two interchange options: rehabilitate existing interchange ramps with substandard geometry; or reconstruct the ramps to improve geometry.
- Exit 2, two interchange reconstruction options: diamond type interchange configuration; or diamond type configuration NB and loop configuration for the SB ramps.

- Exit 3, a range of options that include: (potentially nine choices) various combinations of improvements for I-93 mainline, NH 111, and the NB/SB ramps.
- Exit 4, two mainline options: easterly widening option that retains the existing SB ramps; or westerly widening option, which requires reconstruction of the SB ramps.
- Exit 5, three interchange options: diamond interchange configuration with NH 28 on-line; or diamond interchange configuration with NH 28 off-line to the east of I-93; or diamond interchange configuration SB with NB interchange ramps realigned opposite Liberty Drive.

Tony noted that space for a potential future rail corridor is also being considered as part of this project. The rail line would begin in Massachusetts, either connected to the existing Manchester to Lawrence rail line or perhaps connected to a new line that would follow I-93 in MA to the Woburn Transportation Center. Space for a rail corridor would be reserved in NH for either option. In NH, the rail line begins along the west side of I-93 at the MA/NH state line and continues northerly until just north of Exit 1 where the rail line would cross into the median and continue inside the median, through Exit 5. North of Exit 5, the line would then be connected to the existing Manchester to Lawrence Branch to the west of I-93. This would provide the potential for a future connection to the Manchester Airport or downtown Manchester.

In addition, three new Park and Ride facilities are being proposed as part of the I-93 corridor improvements with facilities planned at Exits 2, 3 and 5.

Tony then described the proposed 200 scale improvement plans and options for the I-93 corridor in the Manchester/Londonderry area. The plans depict both 3-lane and 4-lane layout options for the I-93 mainline.

Tony explained that there are three interchange options for the Exit 5 interchange. A Park and Ride is also being considered in the northwest quadrant of the interchange with access from Symmes Drive. Tony then described the 200 scale plans in more detail beginning at the Manchester /Londonderry Town line for the NB barrel and then the SB barrel.

North of the Exit 5 interchange in Londonderry, the layout for the NB barrel continues to hold the outside edge as a control with widening towards the median through the Londonderry/Manchester Town Line where it begins to transition into the NHDOT's current Bodwell Road project construction improvements. The Bodwell Road project improvements are identified on the plans in orange, rather than the yellow and brown coloring used for the proposed design, to more clearly identify the limits of this current construction. The I-93 NB widening would match into the Bodwell Road project by adding width to the outside (easterly) edge of the NB barrel. In doing so, impacts to Cohas Brook and associated wetlands can be minimized. The four NB travel lanes transition to five NB lanes south of the Bodwell Road bridge crossing to allow for traffic to connect to I-293 NB/NH 101 WB or continue north on I-93. The five lanes would be carried north to the I-93 NB/I-293 NB/NH 101 WB split where two NB lanes would diverge to the west and match into the existing two lanes for the I-293 NB/NH 101 WB connection and three NB lanes would continue northerly and match into the existing three I-93 NB travel lanes.

The SB barrel for I-93 is also widened to the outside (westerly) edge through the Londonderry/Manchester Town Line where it then transitions into the current Bodwell Road improvements. Similar to the NB barrel, the I-93 widening would match the SB barrel into the current construction work by widening to the outside (westerly side) of the SB barrel. Two SB travel lanes from I-293 SB/NH 101 EB would merge with three travel lanes from I-93 SB, north of the Bodwell Road bridge crossing. The five lanes would be carried south over the Bodwell Road

bridge crossing and then transition to four travel lanes. If the three lane option is chosen as the build alternative then the four lane section would continue southerly for approximately 0.25 miles and then transition to the three lane section.

Sound Barriers

Noise barrier locations currently being evaluated in Manchester include three locations along the NB barrel:

- Newton's Meadow Way
- An area just south of the Bodwell Road underpass
- An area just south of Island Pond Road

Property Acquisitions

No homes or businesses will need to be acquired as part of the highway improvements through the Manchester segment. Portions of some properties abutting the highway may be impacted and need to be acquired.

Wetland Mitigation

Bill Barry explained that as part of the federal guidelines for projects like this the Department is required to mitigate impacts to wetlands. As such the process has begun to identify possible wetland mitigation sites to offset impacts resulting from the project improvements. Bill noted that the total number of wetland impacted for the project from Salem to Manchester is approximately 55 to 70 acres. In the City of Manchester the wetland impacts are approximately 6 acres. Both the quantity and the quality of wetland impacts need to be identified. In Manchester, the quality of the wetlands was identified, based on professional judgment, as primarily moderate to high quality. Three major functions and values of the existing wetlands are considered which helps in determining the quality of the wetland. They include flood flow alteration (storage), water quality treatment function, and wildlife habitat.

As directed by the Resource Agencies, the project must provide compensatory mitigation to compensate for the impacts. The mitigation is essentially made up of four forms:

- Wetland restoration, which in effect restores previously, filled wetlands.
- Enhanced wetlands, by planting different plants or by changing the hydrology of existing wetlands.
- Wetland creation, which creates wetlands out of upland or dry land area.
- Preservation, which involves preserving existing wetland and an adjacent upland. Preservation is popular to the local communities because the property is preserved in perpetuity and managed by the community or some other environmental agency.

Bill described a handout identifying 37 potential mitigation sites of which perhaps a few will be selected to provide some types of compensatory mitigation for the project. Two sites of the 37 are already included in the Department's advance mitigation areas. Currently, the Department has identified four (one creation site and three potential preservation) sites in Manchester as part of our evaluation. The Manchester Parks and Recreation officials identified six additional preservation mitigation sites, which would be primarily dedicated for active and passive recreation use. Bill explained that the locations need further evaluation and discussion with the communities and Resource Agencies as to which sites best serve the mitigation package. Bill noted that the process is flexible and welcomed input on the current list or the addition of other sites.

Schedule

Jeff Brillhart noted that another round of meetings would be held in February and March with similar format to this one with the intent to further identify the Department's preferred alternative prior to the Public Hearing. The DEIS will be published some time in March. The Public Hearing is tentatively scheduled for April or May of next year. The Final Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled for completion by the end of 2002. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2004.

Comments/Questions:

- Comment: The City of Manchester did some drainage modification along Cohas Avenue and since the work has been done, mine and my neighbor's backyards are getting more water. The impact is reducing our ability to use our backyards.
- Jeff Brillhart: As part of the widening project, we have looked at drainage from a conceptual point of view and we plan on purchasing property to detain the runoff so that the rate of runoff is similar as to what is happening today. I would urge you to discuss this again at the Public Hearing. The Department will respond to this issue. [Bruce Thomas from the City of Manchester noted that he would meet with the property owner.]
- Comment: Has the Department thought about constructing another interchange between Exit 5 and Candia Road? Today you cannot go NB on I-93 from Candia Road, you need to go south and use Exit 5 or use Exit 1 on NH 101 and reverse direction to go NB on I-93.
- Bruce Tasker: We try to avoid having the interchanges to close together. Desirably we like to have the interchanges approximately 2-miles apart with a minimum distance of 1-mile. This is to allow the traffic on the mainline to merge and weave with the interchange traffic safely. The interchanges in Concord, NH for example, at Exits 12, 13, 14, 15 are very close together and cause considerable weaving and merging problems and congestion. This section of I-93 NB has a number of interchanges in a fairly short distance beginning with Exit 5 interchange ramps, the I-93/I-293 WB diverge, the I-93/ I-293 EB merge, the Candia Road interchange ramps, finally the I-93/NH 101EB diverge interchange. Adding an additional interchange is not likely because of the congestion and safety problems that would occur.
- Moni Sharma: Has the Department determined the impacts to air quality from this project, including ozone?
- Charlie Hood: All of the alternatives will be analyzed from an air quality perspective including the three-lane vs. the four-lane and the interchange options.
- Moni Sharma: Adding an additional lane may increase the ozone impact especially if the lane allows vehicle speeds to increase greater than 45mph.
- Jeff Brillhart: VHB and the Department will be evaluating these impacts. The information will be available for review in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Information to date indicates that air quality should not be an issue.

- Comment: How soon will the Department notify the property owners regarding the location of the sound barriers and the need to acquire property?
- Jeff Brillhart: The Department will be recommending a preferred alternative for the improvements to I-93, (4-lanes or 3-lanes, sound barriers, interchange options, etc.) at the public hearing. After all the Public Hearing testimony is received, the Department will review all the comments and any plan modifications with the Special Committee appointed by the Governor and Executive Council, the FHWA, and the permitting agencies to come to consensus as to the plan elements. With all approvals in place, final design/construction plans will be prepared using more precise survey information. The plans will show in detail all of the design elements and resultant impacts to all properties and resources. When these plans are available, perhaps a year or so before construction begins, the Department will meet with the property owners to discuss the final disposition of the designs and negotiate any right-of-way damages. In Manchester, the right of way negotiations are perhaps 3 to 4 years away, assuming that the construction begins to the south in Salem and continues northerly. The actual construction sequencing has not been determined at this time.
- Charlie Hood: Once a Public Hearing has been held, the Department would typically hold neighborhood meetings with all of the property owners who would get relief from the construction of sound barriers. The Department would ask the property owners as to how they feel about the barrier location and height and resultant impacts. Only if 75% of these property owners agree that a barrier should be constructed will the Department build the barrier.
- Comment: The construction that is going on at Bodwell Road today, will that need to be widened again if the Department decides on the four-lane alternative?
- Tony Grande: One additional lane would be widened to the outside of the new NB and SB bridges for the four-lane alternative. The construction for the current project would end sometime next year. Then in perhaps 3 or 4 years this section of I-93 would be widened again including the additional widening of the Bodwell Road bridge. The future widening would not require reconstructing the retaining walls and sound barriers currently being constructed.
- Peter DeSantis: I would like to thank the Department for adding the bike path to this study.
- Comment: How will I be notified of the next meetings and the Public Hearing?
- Jeff Brillhart: For the next Public Informational meeting you will receive a letter similar to the letter you received for this meeting. For the Public Hearing you will receive a registered letter.